

DRAMA

A MONTHLY RECORD OF THE THEATRE
IN TOWN AND COUNTRY
AT HOME & ABROAD



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DRAMA

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APRIL, MCMXXXVIII

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THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By Lionel Hale

DO you remember the nobleman in one of Mr. Stephen Leacock's "Nonsense Novels" who "leaped upon his horse and rode madly off in all directions"? That is a very fair description of what Mr. James Bridie has done in "The King of Nowhere"—with the difference that Mr. Bridie has not one steed but a stableful of hobby-horses.

I notice that more than one critic uses the adjective "exasperating" of Mr. Bridie. He is exasperating. He is "everything by turns and nothing long," and his plays slip like eels through the fingers. Consider "The King of Nowhere." It is the story of a vain actor, with delusions of persecution, who escapes from a mental home on the Scottish Moors and takes refuge with a middle-aged spinster. (These two parts are played very well, by the way, by Mr. Laurence Olivier and Miss Marda Vanne, although Mr. Olivier is picking up too many of the meaningless tricks of a star actor). This lady, who has lately inherited a fortune, has evolved a political programme on dictatorial lines, and needs only a leader. She sees him in the actor, who has a fine presence and a manly recitation voice. We see the revolution, if it may be called that, beginning; but it weakly leads back to the lunatic asylum, where, still uniformed, breeched and booted, the actor is left bullying a cabinet of fellow-lunatics.

Ideas bristle throughout this play, but as for the idea of this play—well, you may take your choice, for Mr. Bridie has not the slightest wish to put one forward before another. One idea is that theatrically speaking it is effective to have the actor make his entrance still in clown's make-up from the theatre, and very effective it is. Another less fortunate idea is that Miss Sylvia Coleridge

shall be allowed to make too much of farcical interludes as a refined little drab of a nurse. Another idea is that the saintly leader and the madman are very much the same person, which might be found true if Mr. Bridie gave us and himself time to examine it. Another idea is that the actor is a man without depth, who can play at leadership only while it interests him—that he is the façade of a führer and not a führer. And there is any amount of by play, physical and intellectual.

The result of this, and of Mr. Bridie's intolerable habit of giving scenes and sentences extempore quirks of humour that twist them from their intention, is that the mind is always stimulated but, in the result, left unsatisfied.

"Dodsworth" at the Palace reflects great credit on Mr. Sidney Howard, who made a clean and swift adaptation from Mr. Sinclair Lewis's novel, on the scene designers, on the costumiers, and on the stage management. The lavishness of the affair may be gauged by the fact that all that happens in the first scene is that Dodsworth shakes hands in farewell with fifteen employees and his factory and turns to look gloomily out of the window, whereupon one enormous set is whisked off, and another enormous set is whisked on. There are fourteen scenes, and in the short intervals of the short intervals, so to speak, there is some good acting by Mr. George Curzon and Miss Nora Swinburne, among a cast of forty. Miss Gladys Cooper and Mr. Bernard Merivale, having put themselves in the impossible position of hero and heroine in a play dealing with the adventures of uncouth Americans abroad in Europe, pretend as well as could be expected that nothing is wrong with the main theme of the play.

Mr. Thomas Browne is a new author, but

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

his comedy at the St. Martin's, "Plan for a Hostess," shows a very pretty gift for shaping dialogue and scenes. This will be useful to him later, but cannot redeem this play from its odious characters, who blackmail their husbands and lovers, chaffer in their friends' virtue, and would be bearable only in the most savage of satires. Mr. Browne is lucky to have found Miss Yvonne Arnaud, Mr. Ronald Squire and Miss Adrienne Allen, all charming people, to conceal and sugarcoat his bitter pill.

At the Westminster Theatre for a limited run, Mr. F. L. Lucas's "Land's End" was an unfortunate mixture of turgid talk which is profoundly untheatrical and melodrama which lost its place on our stage some years ago. Mr. Lucas turned one out of the cold tap, and the other out of the hot; and the temperature never became even.

On the lighter side of the four weeks under review, there were two scurries-and-scampies, "Surprise Item," which gave Mr. Marius Goring, Miss Valerie Taylor and Mr. John Laurie a pleasant enough excursion into political intrigues in which an English Kipps becomes involved in a Ruritanian coup d'état, and "Toss of a Coin," one of Mr. Walter Hackett's less inspired comedies of espionage, with difficulty rescued from dying by the endearing quavers of Miss Marion Lorne.

The private societies have been busy. The Group Theatre produced Mr. Clifford Odet's near-Tchehov play of Jewish-American tenement life, "Awake and Sing," which was impressive in spite of failures in casting and direction; and the same society gave Mr. Stephen Spenders' verse play on the problem of the Liberal in a Communist-Fascist crisis, "Trial of a Judge," which probably reads very well. Miss Lilian Braithwaite appeared at the Gate in a psychoanalytical-physiological play about Queen Elizabeth, adapted from the French, and Miss Beatrice Lehmann acted Electra again in "No More Music," a play by Miss Rosamund Lehmann which was moving in atmosphere but unsure in direction.

The most successful private performance, however, was given at the Players Theatre of Mr. Aubrey Danville Walker's "Heaven and Charing Cross," a drama of Cockney life with a racy dialogue, a well-handled murder, and a brave and original treatment of a triangle of a mother, spoiled son, and jealous crippled daughter.

THE OLD VIC AND THE NATIONAL THEATRE.

THERE has been a good deal of discussion from time to time on the relations between these two theatres, and it has even been suggested that competition between them would be inevitable. On March 15th a Banquet was held at the Mansion House which brought in donations of over £5,000 to the Lilian Baylis Memorial Fund. At this fine result none were more pleased than the Committee of the National Theatre who have deferred any direct appeal to the Public on behalf of the National Theatre so as to allow a free field to the Appeal for the Old Vic.

As an earnest of what we hope will be friendliness and practical collaboration between the two theatres, we print below a correspondence which appeared in the "Times" on the eve of the Mansion House banquet.

SIR,
In view of the forthcoming banquet to be held at the Mansion House on March 15 to further and perhaps consummate the appeal on behalf of the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells my committee wish it to be known as widely as possible that they are in the fullest sympathy with the appeal. They believe that the establishment of the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells on a sound financial basis is indeed a first call on the generosity of London theatre-lovers, and that such a memorial to Lilian Baylis is the one that she would have desired.

My committee would like to take this opportunity of reasserting that when the building of the National Theatre is completed it will in no way compete with the Old Vic. The policy will be widely different, but no doubt means will be found whereby constant and most friendly cooperation will ensue.

Yours faithfully,
GEOFFREY WHITWORTH,
Hon. Secretary,
Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre
Committee.

50, Pall Mall, S.W.1.

SIR,
As managing governor of the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells and hon. secretary of the Lilian Baylis Memorial Fund, I wish to say how gladly I reciprocate the sentiments expressed in Mr. Geoffrey Whitworth's letter on behalf of the Shakespeare Memorial National Theatre Executive Committee. In doing so I feel sure that I speak for the governors of our two theatres and for the committee of the Lilian Baylis Memorial (Vic-Wells Completion) Fund. When the time comes for co-operation in the activities of a national theatre Mr. Whitworth and his committee may rely on the friendliness and sympathy of those in charge of the great work which Lilian Baylis created.

Yours faithfully,
REGINALD ROWE,
Lilian Baylis Memorial (Vic-Wells Completion Fund)
19, Old Buildings, Lincoln's Inn, W.C.

THE MUSIC AND DRAMA BILL

THE time has come when it seems only right that readers of "Drama" should be informed of the official attitude of the Drama League to the League of Audiences and to the Music and Drama Bill which is being sponsored by that body.

In our issue for November, 1937, appeared an article by Mr. Alfred Wareing, which we were glad to print not only because of its distinguished authorship, but because it is our practice to give publicity to any enterprise that is concerned to help the theatre. There is no gainsaying that to help Music and Drama is the only object which is before the League of Audiences, and the strong backing which the League has already obtained for its Music and Drama Bill is a thoroughly healthy sign that the country as a whole is alive to the importance of encouraging the living stage.

Mr. Alfred Wareing with indomitable courage has succeeded not only in winning this support, but also in going further than any of his predecessors towards obtaining State help for the theatre. A Committee of the House of Commons has been formed which is said to be ready to give active support to the Music and Drama Bill if and when it can be laid before Parliament. The Bill itself is, in our view, contrived on a sound principle, and if the League's Council has been unable altogether to endorse it, it is with the utmost regret.

There are, however, one or two features in the Bill about which it is best to write and speak quite frankly. To put the matter in a nutshell, we feel that an otherwise excellent idea is marred by the inclusion of certain elements not essential to the main scheme, and containing seeds of danger both to the theatre and to the community.

The main purpose of the Bill is to obtain the establishment by Parliament of a body of Commissioners with powers to allocate a sum annually voted by the Treasury for the promotion of approved musical and dramatic enterprises. So far so good. But further than this, it is suggested that the Commissioners should be empowered:

"To undertake the management or supervision, upon such terms and subject to such conditions as may be agreed upon, of any established undertaking engaged in the production of any musical or dramatic work

or works when in the opinion of the Commissioners such undertaking is financially sound:

"To undertake the collection, preparation, publication and distribution whether gratis or otherwise of such statistics papers magazines periodicals books circulars and other musical and dramatic matter as may seem conducive to the promotion and advancement of Music and Drama:

"Acquire by purchase registration or otherwise copyrights in any musical or dramatic works and use develop or grant licenses of or otherwise turn to account the same as they may think desirable."

A moment's thought will show that these provisions go far beyond the normal functions of a body empowered to give "grants in aid." The Commissioners, in short, would be in a position to act in an executive and administrative capacity. A Government of propagandist tendency might easily, through subservient Commissioners, obtain ideological control of the theatres benefiting by their grants. Moreover, when once the Commissioners become embroiled in the exploitation of dramatic material they could scarcely avoid the temptation to compete with other theatrical enterprises outside their orbit. A National Theatre is one thing. The nationalisation of the theatre another.

It seems to us that the objection has only to be stated to become conclusive, and it is a thousand pities that this Bill has been drafted on the lines of the "Woods and Forests Commission" rather than on those of the "University Grants Committee," which from our point of view is innocuous.

The Council of the League desiring to take advice on this matter set up a special Committee who in turn summoned a special Conference of the leading theatrical organisations in this country as follows:

The Association of Repertory Theatres.
British Actors' Equity.
The British Drama League.
The League of British Dramatists.
The Entertainment Protection Association.
The Stage and Allied Arts League.
The Society of West-End Theatre Managers, and The Theatrical Managers' Association.
At this Conference the discussion centred on two issues. (1) The principle of State aid

THE MUSIC AND DRAMA BILL

for the theatre in general. (2) The Music and Drama Bill in particular.

In regard to (1). It was pointed out that at the present time the theatre, both professional and amateur, was suffering very unjustly under the tax on living entertainment. Except in some instances, theatrical enterprise is not a paying proposition, and it is notorious that many touring companies have been obliged to close down owing to the burden of the tax. Therefore as a preliminary to grants in aid of the theatre from Public Funds, it seemed only logical to demand the abolition of the entertainment tax.

(2). When it came to the details of the Music and Drama Bill, the meeting showed itself in entire agreement with the view taken by the Drama League, and the following resolution was passed unanimously:—

"The above bodies agree that in their opinion the objects of the Music and Drama Bill which is being sponsored by the League of Audiences would be best served by obtaining the abolition of Entertainment Tax on performances of the living stage. When this has been effected, they would be prepared to support the underlying principle of the Bill which, however, as at present drafted, would appear to require substantial amendment."

It appears to us that the Drama League has done a service in obtaining this expression of opinion from a conference so representative of the theatre both in London and in the Provinces, and also of the amateur movement. We think also that when the time comes the Resolution should prove a powerful advantage to the prospects of the Music and Drama Bill. For an important point has been gained by the promise of support to the principle of State endowment which is now for the first time given by organisations which have previously refrained from expressing approval of any such development. It should also be noticed that the abolition of the entertainment tax would in effect return to the theatre, both professional and amateur, a larger annual sum of money than could reasonably be expected to reach it through the Music and Drama Bill.

The merits of that Bill, when purged of its doubtful clauses, are untouched, and we hope that members of the Drama League will throw their whole weight behind the Bill if and when the preliminary conditions mentioned above have been satisfied.

THE NEW YORK THEATRE SEASON

By Shirland Quin

THE Broadway theatre season of 1937-1938 is making plain with almost every opening that it is no longer standing on its toes to welcome British fare to the great white way. English companies must no longer expect to receive their former fond acclaim merely because they are British and therefore to be praised. Instead, they must be prepared for stringent criticism if they cannot compete with the vital plays now being written and played by America herself.

There is little doubt that had "French Without Tears" and "George and Margaret" arrived in mid-season, instead of getting away with an early Autumn start, their runs would have been a matter of days rather than weeks, for the theatrical gulf between the two countries is widening.

For this reason it is not surprising that "Time and the Conways" has had but a lukewarm reception from the critics despite the presence of Dame Sybil Thorndike and two most sensitive performances given by Joan Henley, who does wonders with the thankless part of a gawky, spinster schoolmistress, and by Godfrey Kenton as the older brother.

However, the time-honoured belief that anything British must be superior to native fare was a belief bound to diminish. It is healthy that it should and that America should become aware of her own dramatists, who, although they may lack subtlety, nevertheless have a vigor, force, and a growing imaginativeness exciting to observe.

"Golden Boy" by Clifford Odets and "Mice and Men" by John Steinbeck are excellent plays, worth half a dozen of any of the recent British importations.

In "Golden Boy" Odets has striven to present an allegory in modern terms. The "Golden Boy" is a prize-fighter, but the story of the play is by no means merely the story of his scintillating rise to world championship. It is the presentation of a greater fight, one with which we are all confronted—the fight to determine our own individual place in a society that recognises only success and makes victims of the unsuccessful. "Golden Boy" relinquishes his chance of being a violinist,



SCENE FROM "OUT OF THE PICTURE" BY
LOUIS MACNEICE. AS PRODUCED RECENTLY
BY F. SLADEN-SMITH FOR THE UNNAMED
SOCIETY, MANCHESTER.



A SCENE IN THE GREEN ROOM. FROM AN
OLD PRINT BY JOHN STERNDAL. (1869.)

THE NEW YORK THEATRE SEASON

(than which there are few careers fraught with more chances of failure), and turns to the ring where acclaim and success can be assured him. The conflict in the youth between his choice of the artist's life with its simple contentments, and the "fight" world of greedy speculation, is brilliantly done.

Unquestionably this is the most interesting play on Broadway and is presented by the Group Theatre, who last year achieved the same distinction with their presentation of "Johnny Johnson" by Paul Jones.

The record of The Theatre Guild has been outstandingly poor for the season. "To Quito and Back" by Ben Hecht; "The Ghost of Yankee Doodle" by Sidney Howard; and "Madame Bovary" are all plays unworthy of the Guild standard of production. Only "Amphitryon 38," in which the Lunts appear, is worthy of acclaim. Even so this comedy by Giraudoux, adapted by Behrman, becomes somewhat dreary before the close, despite a deft and sophisticated opening.

A more worthy record is that of the newly-formed Mercury Theatre, whose plain-clothes production of "Julius Cæsar" is notably fine.

There are several comedies to enjoy. In "Susan and God" Rachael Crothers delightfully flays a mentally and emotionally confused convert to the Oxford Group. This comedy is great fun and is one which it is hoped London will see before long, with Gertrude Lawrence giving her superb performance as "Susan."

Another comedy that continues to hold from the previous season is "You Can't Take it With You" by George Kaufman and Moss Hart. This is the American—and superior—parallel of "George and Margaret," portraying an American family who prefer to share a small income and follow their inclinations and hobbies, than be "respectable" and hard-working citizens. Every character in this play is vividly drawn and warmly alive.

Musical satires are well to the fore. "I'd Rather Be Right" again by Kaufman, is perhaps the most popular, but "The Cradle Will Rock," a "red" operetta by Marc Blitzstein is causing plenty of comment. Unfortunately, although it has definitely something to say and says it in an original manner, it is an uneven job.

Altogether the New York season for 1937-1938 is far ahead of its predecessor and seems alive with a fine vitality.

THE GREEN-ROOM

By Gerard Fay

EVERY theatre had, at one time, a green-room where the actors used to congregate while waiting for their entrances. After making-up, and finishing off the details of their costumes, they would step down to the green-room, which was always near the stage. There they would converse with their fellow actors, talk shop, and parade for the admiration of the laymen who were always to be found flitting round this outpost of the glamorous stage itself. Summoned by the call-boy "in the tone of command which the small fry of Parnassus adopt" they would rush off to the stage, returning again when the scene was over, to continue their broken conversations. An amusing reconstruction of the green-room scene is to be found in Charles Reade's "Peg Woffington," though the description is not to be taken as historically accurate.

Nowadays green-rooms are rare; in most theatres the actors wait in their dressing rooms after they have finished making-up, and a picturesque part of the theatre is used for more utilitarian purposes.

The origin of the term "green-room" has puzzled theatrical research workers for many years, and there is still no satisfactory explanation available of why the description arose. One of the earliest, and most fantastic, theories is that when travelling troupes of companies arrived at a country town they used to ask permission to play in the town hall; they usually gave their performance in the council chamber, which was known as the "agreeing" or "greeing" room, and it is suggested that "green" is derived from "greeing." When Shakespeare was five years old, his father—then high bailiff of the town, gave permission for a troupe of actors to play in the "greeing room of Stratford-on-Avon.

Another suggestion is that the room was so called because the floor was covered in green baize, and the furniture was upholstered in green. This explanation, along with much interesting information about the green-room of Covent Garden in the middle of the 19th century is given in Vandenhoff's "Green Room and Stage." The words appear more often with the hyphen than without it, and that might

THE GREEN-ROOM

indicate that the "green" is not necessarily meant as an adjective.

Going back, as he always does, to the roots of the problem, Dr. W. J. Lawrence has discovered that the room was formerly called the "scene-room" (hyphenated again) and he suggests that the later name came about through "green" being substituted for "scene," possibly influenced by the green carpet and furniture which were almost universally used. It has also been suggested that the room was used for the storage of the green stage-carpet and that therefore the name green-room is a description of function rather than appearance.

It is certain that in the 18th century there was a good deal of green about every playhouse. The front curtain was green, the stage-hands had a green uniform (which was still to be seen up to the middle of the last century), there was always a green baize carpet in tragedies for the hero to die on, and in many ways the actors expressed their preference for green over other colours. It is not surprising, therefore, that the scene-room came to be called the green-room.

The green-room had many distinguished visitors—Pepys and Dr. Johnson among them. The latter found that the actresses in various stages of undress had rather a bad effect on him, so he gave up his visits. For the most part, though, the green-room was infested by fops and wags and hangers-on who could do nothing but harm to the theatre. Their conduct went a long way towards giving theatre-people the bad name which clung to them until comparatively recently and which, even in these days of gossip-column adulation, has not entirely disappeared. The green-room as a luxury for actors was a desirable place, but as a rendezvous for the stage-door johnnies of the times, it was a nuisance. Moreover, since actors have apparently always been high spirited people it created a congregating place where all sorts of jokes might be hatched, mischief plotted, and personal animosities publicly vented. The descriptions of green-room activities in Dicken's "Life of Grimaldi," and the illustration by "Phiz" (reproduced on plate 2) of a green-room in a London "Penny Gaff," do not give an impression of quietude or orderliness. In the larger theatres, however, particularly after the middle of the 19th century, the green-room was a real amenity for the actors rather than for outsiders, and Vandenhoff says "The Green-

room in Covent Garden Theatre was a most agreeable lounging-place, a divan adorned with beauties, where one could pass a pleasant hour in the society of charming women and men of gentlemanly manners, and from which was banished every word or allusion that would not be tolerated in a drawing room."

The green-room was used in the daytime for meetings of the actors, for readings of plays, and probably for distributing salaries on treasury day—or in less trusting times, after each performance. No doubt it was also used for rehearsals when the stage was not available. When the manager had an important announcement to make to his company, he would assemble them in the green-room, and it was at such an assembly in the Smock Alley Theatre in Dublin that Thomas Sheridan (Richard Brinsley's father) gave instructions to the actor Digges to refuse to repeat a certain speech if the audience demanded it—a refusal which caused one of the most destructive riots in theatre history.

There is a green-room in the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, or there was a few years ago. It was used by the actors, for the traditional purpose, and was also the scene of the directors meetings. Probably the other theatres in these islands where there is a green-room in use could be very easily counted.

The green-room was a good idea that went wrong. If it had been kept purely for the use of the actors, it would have been an excellent addition to the theatre's equipment, but used as a gossiping and quarrelling room it did a great deal of harm. It was used for the collection of scurrilous material for such books as "The secret history of the Green Rooms" published towards the end of the 18th century, and the other volumes of libellous and malicious "biography" which appeared around that period.

Apart from the preservation of illusion, it is important from a disciplinary point of view that the public should be kept on its own side of the curtain, and although some sort of communal waiting-room for actors should be built in to any ideal theatre of the future, it should be governed in a way which would prevent the abuses of the earlier green-rooms.

Mr. Roger Williams, Producer and Art Director of the Oldham Repertory Theatre, Horsedje Street, Oldham, is ready to try out new and original plays.

SPEED BEHIND THE SCENES

By A Stage Manager

FEW theatre-goers realise the great difficulty which producers are often faced with in providing varied and extensive scenery for their players. They know little of the secrets of scene-shifting, and, indeed, are often inclined to agree with Robert Louis Stevenson in believing that to understand the mechanism by means of which artistic effects are produced is to spoil the enjoyment of their beauty. But, although this may be partly true, there is little doubt that to understand something of the purely mechanical difficulties with which all producers must contend is to be in a position to appreciate the results of their ingenuity with keener relish.

Unhappily, the people who build theatres frequently are unable to give careful consideration to stage requirements, for soaring ground rents usually compel them to cut down stage space to an absolute minimum. And herein lies the secret of much of the producer's tribulation. He is compelled to bear in mind continually the restrictions imposed by the two factors of time and space.

To strike a full scene may take from five to eight minutes—an impossible wait. Some method must therefore be contrived of keeping several scenes in readiness for exposure in rapid succession. What is the best method of solving this problem?

As many people are aware, one method is to contrive a circular platform rotating on a pivot, and split up to accommodate, say four scenes. Immediately the curtain falls on the first scene, the table is moved round to show the second. A revolving stage allows ample time to re-set the first scene before the fourth has been shown, but it is seldom used as it takes up far too much space.

A similar objection holds good in cases of the lateral and up and down methods of arranging scenery. In the former, the scenes are arranged in a row on the flat and pushed into position on the stage one after another, whilst in the latter precisely the same principal is involved, but the scenes stand one on top of the other and are raised or lowered to the stage level as the case may be. Both these methods are employed considerably in Germany.

Excellent as these devices are, they do not meet the requirements of the many theatres which are too small to accommodate them. There is, however, a less well-known contrivance which is often adopted. This is a device by means of which the walls of the first scene are made to pivot upon themselves in such a way as to disclose a second and third setting behind.

Suppose, for example, the curtain rises on a triangular scene showing the interior of the house. Immediately it falls, the wall on the right hand is pivoted across the stage on small wheels like castors. Covering up the original left hand wall, it discloses an entirely new setting. When the time arrives for the third scene both walls are pivoted across the stage and this time the back of the original left wall is shown and the scenery which it hid disclosed.

By employing this method, three scenes can be shown with an interval of about one minute between each. And when they have all been used either the recognised break between the acts has arrived, allowing time to arrange a fresh setting, or else the first scene has been struck while the other two are showing and is again ready for use. In addition to its other advantages, this device eliminates the rather uninteresting flat scenes with which plays are sometimes opened when the more elaborate methods of scene-shifting cannot be employed.

Such a device is capable of tremendous adaptation and extension and is without the disadvantages which apply to the better known but more cumbersome arrangements. It is certain that most producers would welcome any suggestions to alleviate the strain of what has been called the "nightly miracle."

In the notice of the Chiswick Polytechnic production of "Murder in the Cathedral" appearing in the last Number of "Drama," the last sentence should have read: Miss Margaret Arnott, the producer, banished from her mind, and from the mind of her cast, all memory of the London production, so that it came over as a fresh and imaginative piece of production, instead of a mere imitation of a West-End success, as it might so easily have been.

An unfortunate misprint, for which we apologise, gave precisely the opposite sense.

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF

THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

INCORPORATING

THE VILLAGE DRAMA SOCIETY

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Telephone : EUSTON 2666.

Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

IN our next issue we shall publish the usual complete list of entries for the Community Theatre Festival. As already announced the Final will take place at the Theatre Royal, Glasgow, on Monday evening, May 30th. The principal Adjudicator will be Mr. Norman Marshall, and Mr. James Bridie has already consented to act as one of his two colleagues. Reports from the Areas prove that interest in the Festival performances is undiminished, though the entries in the three English Areas show a curious discrepancy in their rise and fall. From the beginning this tendency has always been apparent, and no doubt depends on local conditions which would be hard to analyse. The effect of the "News-Chronicle" Contest on our own Festival entries was probably negligible, as is shown by the fact that our total for London is practically the same as last year. Our own view that interest in the one-act play is quite a different thing from interest in the three-act play seems to have been justified.

An important step has just been taken by the French Chamber of Deputies which has approved a project of the Minister of National Education and Fine Arts for the reorganisation of the French State Theatres. Until now the French Government has subventioned the Opera and the Opera-Comique, the Comédie-Française and the Odéon. Now it is proposed that the State shall assume all financial responsibility for these operatic and dramatic stages, the sum of 43 million francs being asked, half of which is to come from the tax on radio receiver tubes. The two operas will have a common governing body, the Comédie-Française will remain much as it is, and the Odéon will become the centre of a vast project of popular theatre. This latter project means that the two immense auditoriums of the Salle Pleyel and of the new Trocadero will also have popular priced seats with the company, costumes and scenery of the Odeon, and this may be extended to the provincial theatres.

Arrangements for the year's programme of Drama Schools are now well in hand and entries are coming in daily both for the School Drama Course and the Playwrights' Conference, in Easter week. The experiment of the Playwrights' Conference is meeting with encouraging response, and about forty MS. plays have already been received. The Summer Schools are definitely fixed for Scarborough (Queen Margaret's School) from July 30th to August 13th, and Buxton, from August 29th to September 8th, during the visit of the Old Vic Company for the Buxton Festival. A week-end school is being held at Doncaster from April 29th to May 1st.

A marriage of great interest to members of the British Drama League was celebrated on Saturday, April 2nd, at the Cathedral Church, Birmingham, between Miss Phyllis Philip-Rodway, daughter of the late Mr. Philip Rodway, the well-known theatre manager, and Mr. W. Bushill Matthews, the popular official of the Western Area, and member of the League's Council. We take this opportunity of wishing them, on behalf of all their friends in the League, long life and happiness.

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by F. Sladen-Smith

"A History of the American Drama." By Arthur Hobson Quinn. Pitman. 21s.

"The Summing Up." By W. Somerset Maugham. Heinemann. 10s. 6d.

"A History of English Costume." By Iris Brooke. Methuen. 8s. 6d.

"The Boy David." By J. M. Barrie. Peter Davies.

^{5s.} "Ten Peace Plays." Edited by R. H. Ward. Dent. 5s.
"The Herne's Egg." By W. B. Yeats. Macmillan.

^{5s.} "Alfred the Great." By Ralph Gustafson. Michael Joseph. 5s.

"Twenty-Five Modern One-Act Plays." Edited by John Bourne. Gollancz. 5s.

"Best Australian Plays." Selected by William Moore and T. Inglis Moore. Angus and Robertson.

^{6s.} "Fourteen Sketches." Edited by Sydney Box. Nelson. 3s. 6d.

"Three Religious Plays." By J. Welham Clarke. Westminster City Publishing Co. (No price given).

"Gold and Frankincense." By Richard Whitwell. C. W. Daniel. 1s. 6d.

"Three Generations." By Andrew P. Wilson. McQueen and Son. 1s. 6d.

"Square Pegs." By Lionel Brown. Deane & Sons. 2s. 6d.

"The Ride Through Coventry." By Olive Popplewell. Deane and Son. 1s.

"A Junior Reciter's Repertory." Compiled by Kathleen Rich. Methuen. 3s. 6d.

"A HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN DRAMA," by Dr. Arthur Hobson Quinn, is as comprehensive as might be expected; the labour which has gone to its making must have been immense. Hundreds of plays are dealt with, and, in nearly all cases, we are given a précis of the plot and a description of the author's life and general achievement. The earlier part of the volume is concerned with the plays immediately after the civil war and onwards, and some truly amazing dramas are described, often with an appreciation difficult to share; for however bad English drama of the period may have been, American drama seems to have been worse, and sentences such as "Rags are royal raiment when worn for virtue's sake, and rather a hoe in my hands than self-contempt in my heart," brought down the house. Dr. Quinn's apparent admiration for these plays and the strange "laws of drama" which made them possible, scarcely prepares us for the discernment with which modern work is analysed in the second and more interesting portion of the book. The author is a little hard on Elmer Rice and Odets, and obviously has no liking for the Scandinavian school, but the skill with which he discusses the work of O'Neil (who, rightly, receives a major share of attention), Marc Connelly, George Kaufman, Paul Green, Robert Sherwood, and all the writers of "the new decade" is usually both delightful and penetrating. One finishes this long book with the impression that few things connected with American drama have been omitted, and some wise things written about all sorts and conditions of plays and playwrights.

Mr. W. Somerset Maugham begins his remarkable book, "The Summing Up," by stating that it is neither an autobiography nor a book of recollections. Soon after he says, frankly, that he puts limits to the intimacy that he wishes the reader to enter upon with him—and it is astonishing how little is revealed of actual experience and how much of the experiences of the mind; in this case, a mind ever striving to create pattern out of the surrounding chaos. In the last pages we gather that, although there may be additions, Mr. Maugham considers his pattern to be virtually complete. The book itself is a pattern; a definite order and form adds greatly to the arresting force of the many chapters in which it seems as if all things that matter in the life of man are discussed—art, beauty, love, suffering, religion, youth, old age, death. Especially interesting to playgoers will be the sections dealing with play-writing, the reactions of the audience, and the encroachments of the modern director—Sir Gerald du Maurier's remark to Mr. Maugham that he took no interest in directing a play he could not partly re-write, shows how dangerous the new autocracy in the theatre can be. While fully realising that great changes are bound to come, the book is written from the patrician angle; "I have always thought life too short to do anything for oneself that one can pay others to do for one" requires some courage to write nowadays, but courage is one of the things the author has never lacked. Unfortunately, space does not permit us to discuss any longer a book in which there is not a dull or unworthy page; we can only recommend everyone who is interested in adventures of the spirit to read it without delay.

Miss Iris Brooke states that her new book, "A History of English Costume," is in the nature of a skeleton history, and it is certainly simpler than some of the massive tomes we have had on the subject of late. It describes, in entertaining fashion, the evolution of costume from 1066 to 1900, and is illustrated by the authoress with nearly three hundred drawings. The account is, of necessity, abbreviated (although we feel that we might have been given a glimpse of the Puritans) but it should please wardrobe mistresses who have neither time nor inclination for further research.

Mr. Harley Granville-Barker, in his sensitive preface to "The Boy David," tells us that its critical reception disappointed Barrie "even grievously." This, and other details in the preface, as well as memories of the sensational delays of production, add to the interest in reading the play. It is a work of great beauty; evanescent as a Lakeland dawn; and supremely difficult to act without a perpetual coarsening of the exquisitely fine issues. Also, conscious of the clash and clamour of the period, the author has added fights and spectacular effects, appropriate enough for the huge theatre in which the play was produced, but which seem in conflict with an atmosphere far more suited for Little Theatre work than vast buildings filled with traditions of the Grand Manner. Even when produced with scrupulous care in an intimate theatre this study of celtic boyhood with historical additions would present difficulties; the spectacle could be reduced without harm, but while there are many men, there is only one woman's part worth playing (unless David is considered a woman's part), and the final scene

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between David and Jonathan makes an unsatisfactory ending. But one receives the impression that some lovely and distinguished work has, up to now, met with undeserved misfortune.

Mr. R. H. Ward, the Editor of "Ten Peace Plays," has been careful to stress the more general and constructive ideals of peace than to choose plays which aim only at depicting the horrors of actual warfare. To be sure, Miss Eileen Russell's very striking "All Quiet in the Air," shows us what we may be experiencing shortly, but after that we move into quieter waters; indeed, Miss Vera I. Arlett's delicate trifle, "the Door was Closed," could appear in any play anthology. "Jonathan's Day," by Mr. Horace Flather, and "Eleventh Hour," by Mr. Anthony Armstrong, are stronger stuff, and both "Tarakin" by Miss Martha Steinitz and "The Governor" by Miss Edith M. Barling (with its echo of Pontius Pilate) show martyrdom in the cause of peace. There is a farcical comedy by Mr. Robert Victor, an episode of the Russian frontier in 1910 by Mr. John Pollock, and one is glad to welcome again Mr. Box's didactic "Not This Man," and Mr. Neil Grant's telling fantasy "The Last War."

We know three things about "The Herne's Egg" by Mr. W. B. Yeats. We know that it is by a great poet, that it is intended for the theatre as it is definitely called "a stage play," and that the characters consist of two Kings, a Priestess called Attracta, her servant, her three friends, six men and a fool. The rest is decorative chaos; and seems mainly concerned with the attempt to force Attracta to sleep with seven men in order to rid her of the domination of the Great Herne. No doubt it is all intended to be taken symbolically, but the precise symbolism of most of this exceedingly strange play has so far escaped us. Mr. Ralph Gustafson's poetic drama "Alfred the Great" shows considerable knowledge of the tumultuous and difficult period of Alfred's reign; the various settings and some of the incidents are so obviously right that one regrets somewhat confused verse which has a tendency to obscure rather than clarify the atmosphere.

"Twenty-five Modern One-Act Plays," edited by Mr. John Bourne, is decidedly better than the anthologies to which we are becoming resigned. All types of drama are represented, but we note, with regret, that the comedies are the least satisfactory. Mr. Rubinstein has an amusing study of the great Samuel in "Johnson Was No Gentleman," and Dr. Gordon Bottomley, forsaking tragedy, gives us, in "The Falconer's Daughter," an experiment with a strangely arresting atmosphere; there is also a perfect sketch of a bar full of yokels in Mr. Laurence Housman's rather slight piece, "The Village Conjuror," while dialect farce is well represented by Mr. Gregson's "Mate for Two." Serviceable plays in the collection are Mr. T. B. Morris' "Mirror to Elizabeth" (for an all-women cast), Mr. Cedric Mount's "Dirge Without Dole," and Dr. Du Garde Peach's "Shells." There are other plays we should like to mention—for instance, "This Earth is Ours," by Mr. William Kozlemko, is one of the most horrible we have read, and in great contrast to the gentle pathos of Miss Esther McCracken's "Between the Lace Curtains," or Mr. Philip Johnson's "It's Autumn Now,"—while authors as well known as Mr. Ashley Dukes, Mr. Ivor Brown, Mr. Harold Brighouse and Mr. Clifford Bax contribute work which, inevitably, adds interest to the volume.

Mr. William Moore and Mr. T. Inglis Moore have selected twenty-one plays by Australian authors out of two hundred sent in, and the result is "Best Australian One-Act Plays" is often more remarkable for general atmosphere than actual merit. The Editors state that preference was shown for work with a definitely Australian flavour, and this fact gives the volume a character all its own. There are a few examples which, like Mr. Leslie Clarke Rees' "Sub-Editor's Room," dramatise facets of life occurring in any large city, but plays such as Mr. Bernard Cronin's powerful study of drought, "Stampede," Miss Betty Roland's striking ticket-of-leave drama, "Morning," or less satisfactory pieces such as Mr. Louis Esson's "Andegonora," or Mr. Montague Grover's "Gib It Tshillin'" (both showing urgent national problems), are entirely Australian in atmosphere. There is an excellent peace play by Mr. Edgar Holt, "Anzac Reunion," and the radio plays, after a bad start, are among the best in the book. Although some of the plays are not of sufficient merit to justify inclusion in this volume, the collection, on the whole, is an interesting one, and the Editors are justified in the pride they obviously feel in presenting it to the public.

In the preface to his anthology "Fourteen Sketches," Mr. Sydney Box tells us that his three tests when selecting the items were that they should be well-written, suitable for amateurs, and free from indelicacy. These fourteen little sketches by well-known authors certainly fulfil Mr. Box's conditions; one presumes that there was a further test with regard to humour, but it could not have been a very severe one. However, few things are more difficult than to judge the possibilities of a revue item from the written page, and doubtless Mr. Harold Plumtre's "Master and Man," Mr. Maurice Moiseiwitsch's rather involved "Napoleon of Room 101," Mr. Cedric Mount's "Nature Abhors a Vacuum," or Mr. Herbert Farjeon's "Snaps" will be among those found valuable for amateur revue or concert work. Mr. Bax's own contribution, "Pray Silence," is one of the best in the book, and there is also an effective Grand Guignol, "The Cat joins the Company," by Mr. Holt Narvell.

The "Three Religious Plays" by the Rev. J. Welham Clarke, have more sense of character than most plays of the same type. In the first, "The Manger," a Nativity play, the disgruntled carpenter, Nathan, not only adds a note of originality to the familiar atmosphere but it is a part which gives definite opportunities to the actor. The second, "Paul—the Pioneer," is a brief sketch of the life of St. Paul, ending with his martyrdom, and the third, "The Radiance," should be especially useful, as there are not many Easter plays, and this one, again, has good characterization, and a realization of the possibilities of simple stagecraft. "Gold and Frankincense" by Mr. Richard Whitwell, is called a Nativity play, but, as the final lines suggest, it is quite as much a Christmas masque, and as such has imaginative detail; but much of the dialogue could be re-written with advantage.

Long plays for an all-woman cast are still rather a novelty, and still usually unsatisfactory, but Mr. Andrew P. Wilson, in his "Three Generations," has written a play which should be appreciated, not only by a large cast of all types, but by the designer of settings and costumes, for although the actual scene is simple, the three acts take place at different periods from fifty years ago to the present day. We follow

RECENT BOOKS

the fortunes of the Maynard family with genuine interest, and, when handled competently, the piece should be sure of some success. The first act can be given separately, but a performance of the play as a whole will be far more satisfactory. "Square Pegs," a play in three acts by Mr. Lionel Brown, is a pleasant if somewhat unconvincing study of a Doctor's family in Birmingham—unconvincing mainly because, although it is quite possible to believe that all the people are as agreeable as they turn out to be, it is difficult to accept a change such as that which turns a tiresome hypochondriac into a resolute, managing head of a household. The Lady Godiva legend has never been

an easy one to dramatize, but Miss Olive Popplewell is to be congratulated on her moving treatment of this theme in "The Ride through Coventry," a one-act play that groups who are growing tired of the present cult of realism should welcome.

"A Junior Reciter's Repertory," compiled by Miss Kathleen Rich, contains poems and one or two stories suitable for recitation by children of various ages. The selection has been carefully made, and includes work by well-known writers and poets. A feature is the section devoted to poems written by children themselves.

SHAKESPEARE AND CHILDREN

By Nancy Hewins

THE reaction of children to Shakespeare's plays is not a new problem, although just at the moment it seems to be regarded as one. There are at least three small professional companies besides ourselves to whom it must be a very vital question all the year round. We have been playing in school halls for over seven years, to children of every possible type and age and in districts as far apart as Caithness and Devon, and by now I think that I, or any of the original members of my company, could make a very good guess at the effect of even a tone of voice on the various kinds of audience. The conclusions I have reached are clear and have become with me a matter of very strong conviction simply through continual contact with the children and their very just likes and dislikes. I began with no theories, highbrow or otherwise, and with only one particular idea, that Shakespeare's plays are thoroughly good entertainment, and that he himself was neither a god whose plays should be taken as pompous ritual, nor a rather academic and inefficient dramatist who should only be read in the study.

Three things are absolutely essential with a children's audience: simplicity, sincerity, and a completely audible and natural delivery of the lines. Speaking Verse, as such, in the curious manner so often taught in Shakespeare classes, is unnecessary and unconvincing. If my younger members, when they first join, begin to lose themselves in the mere sound of the words and metre, I give them a cigarette or a cup of tea, and tell them to think what the words mean. The meaning and the characterisation come first, and the verse will follow.

It is needlessly insulting to suggest that Shakespeare made the meaning opposed to the rhythm.

We play under very odd conditions sometimes. There may be no stage, no electric current for our lighting set, only plain unvarnished daylight or one oil lamp, and the children will probably sit on the floor, and be so near that they will poke Caesar's corpse to see whether it is alive. They may have seen the scenery put up by the very people who must play before them, and the scenery itself is a perfectly simple decorative curtain set with a silver backcloth. Lighting, when we can have it, is most effective with children, provided that effects are not obtained by sacrificing visibility. All the glamour which is naturally present in a real theatre, must be created by the acting. Shakespeare under such conditions must get over on his own merits, and if they are not obscured by traditional or sensational interpretations I will undertake that children will enjoy him as they enjoy the pictures—wholeheartedly.

To be natural and audible in Shakespeare is not easy. You cannot collect a company haphazard for one production and expect good results. It must play together constantly and play in the same style and spirit, and above all the actors must be accustomed to children and completely in sympathy with them. It is to me inexcusable to present a badly rehearsed and carelessly produced play to children. One disappointment may kill the love of a decent play in them for the rest of their lives. Adults will put up with a great deal of inaudibility and so on, but children

demand a high standard or they will never come again.

I have been reading Mr. Darlington's article on laughter in children's audiences. Unexpected incidents will cause laughter if the children are not thoroughly in the play. If they are wrapped up in it unavoidable accidents may pass unnoticed if the actor is used to children and knows how to carry it off, and if laughter comes for any reason (a series of deaths is sometimes a problem) it should be possible to bring the children back instantly. Accidents should not arise from any cause over which the actors or stage management should have control, for children will not easily forgive carelessness. On the other hand I have known Ophelia and St. Joan fall flat on the stage without a sound from the audience, and once in "King John" (not an easy play for children) the Bastard subsided slowly on an inefficient pair of steps, speaking eloquently the while, and the audience was too wrapped up in the scene to notice it at all.

As to the kind of plays children like, my experience is that boys like Blood. "Macbeth," "Julius Caesar," "Hamlet" and any play with plenty of action invariably suits them. They do not like too much love making, and passages of pure poetry, which in a sense hold up the action, often make them restless. And who shall say they are not right? Beautiful words and verse, which are a real part of a character or of the action, do hold them. Tragedy must be played with the most perfect restraint. A touch of melodrama is fatal, and a too hasty movement or a wrong intonation breaks the tension at once. Boys also like the more robust comedies, and girls appreciate most types of play. Comedy must not be overdone or played down to the children, and it must be played naturally and with real (and not traditional) good spirits. It is a surprising thing to many people that children of eight can both enjoy and understand the plays. Even "Hamlet" has been successful in Co. Durham to boys of that age.

There is, I think, only one difference between children and adults. Children will judge a play with no preconceived prejudice and express their liking or dislike plainly. Adults have perhaps been told that Shakespeare is dull, and if they are bored will be too polite to say so. But it is food for thought that I have found—even in our small way of business—that the method of simplicity and sincerity will hold even an adult audience.

THE SHORT PLAY: A NEW ART FORM?

By A. J. Talbot

THE festival season is in full swing and all over the country amateur societies are putting all they know into the production of short plays. They are animated by the pure festival spirit; or a wish to do much better this year; or a healthy desire to wipe the eye of a rival society, or some other admirable reason. But, if they did but know it, they are all doing something else as well: they are helping to establish the one-act play as an art form.

Throughout dramatic history the short play has had no standing and is still regarded to-day with lingering disesteem. Whereas the short story—especially if it is by a foreign author—may be accorded classic rank, the short play is automatically dismissed in most minds as a triviality of no significance whatever.

This prejudice is probably a persistent reflection of the traditional contempt of the professionals for the short play, which was defined by, I think, David Garrick "as an entertainment served up to keep attention awake while something better is preparing." Hence we get from the professionals that insulting word "curtain-raiser." And thus it is that the world is full of people who cannot speak of a short play as a short play: they always use some derisive circumlocution, and to the author's face will call his short play a playlet. Or somebody who ought to know better will write to the dramatist about his "little" play, and is not best pleased if the dramatist, entering into the fun, thanks him for his "little" letter.

Drama, apparently, is the only art where there is any demerit in lack of bulk. In decent society it would be a grave solecism to speak of Turgenev's "little" stories, although of course they are very short. A sculpture may rank as serious work even if it is nothing like so large as the Quadriga. It would be a gaucherie to deny merit to a prelude on the grounds that it was not so long as a sonata, while the man who implied that Vermeer's "The Lacemaker" could not be a great picture because it only measures gin. by 7in. would label himself a fool.

The root of the matter is that the short play has behind it only an unfortunate history of

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"ABRAHAM LINCOLN" (SCENE II) BY
JOHN DRINKWATER. AS PRODUCED BY
WALTER SINCLAIR FOR THE UNIVERSITY
CIVIC THEATRE, DENVER, COLORADO.

LADY W. You are right. But where am I to turn to? You said you would be my friend, Lord Darlington. What am I to do?

LADY W. No—no ! (rises)

LADY W. Lord Darlington

no one else. If there's no love in you! Leave this house to-night. I won't tell you that the world matters nothing, or the world's voice, or the voice of Society. They matter a great deal. They matter too much. But there are moments when one has to choose between living one's own life, fully, entirely, completely—or dragging out some false, shallow, degrading existence. **You** have that moment now. Choose!

LORD D. (following her) Yes, you have the courage. There may be six months of pain, of disgrace even, but when you no longer bear his name, when you bear mine, all will be well then.

It is wrong for a wife to remain with a man who so dishonours her. You said once you would make no compromise with things. Make none now. Oh, come out of this house.

Be brave Be yourself

LADY W. I am afraid of being myself. Let me think.
(crossing a.) Let me wait. My husband may return to me.

"HOW NOT TO USE THE LIBRARY." Specimen page from a set of volumes recently borrowed from the B.D.L. Library. The deletions and underlinings are in ink. Apologies would seem to be due not only to Oscar Wilde but to future borrowers.

THE SHORT PLAY

degradation at the hands of the professionals, who put it to base purposes. It has no classic tradition. The coteries of master dramatists represented by Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Congreve and Sheridan, either wouldn't or couldn't write one-act plays, and so we have the amazing fact that in a vast treasure-house of dramatic literature accumulated over a period of 2,500 years, good one-act plays are only to be found during the last 30 years of that period. Broadly speaking the writing of good short plays is peculiarly a post-war phenomenon, and if anybody doubts this let him try to find a short play up to festival form written at any time from 500 B.C. to 1914, and he will find the selection surprisingly limited.

In our day, then, we are witnessing a determined attempt to give the short play its niche in the temple of art. The initiative in this movement owes little to the senior dramatists, most of whom, when they do experiment in the one-act form, seem to come to the task with an affable condescension, like a heavy-weight champion giving an exhibition bout for charity, or a famous jockey riding in a donkey race at a fete. The steady output of short plays is mostly from the pens of lesser playwrights.

What has caused dramatists for the first time in 2,500 years to give serious attention to the writing of short plays? The answer is that the main stimulus has been a recent innovation, the Community Theatre Festival; for it can hardly be an accident that the feverish output of short plays coincides roughly with the inauguration of this conception of the British Drama League in 1926.

When the rules of this Festival were framed it was the highest wisdom that the choice of play should be left to competitors, instead of giving them a set piece to perform, as in silver band contests; and in the numerous one-act play festivals which have since sprung up in imitation, and which all do the B.D.L. the frank and flattering compliment of following fairly closely the Community Festival rules, the freedom of choice of play always obtains. This is a very healthy thing, both for the amateurs and for dramatic art. It is good for the amateurs, because it forces them to use their own judgment. With long plays, amateurs make their selection on the easy principle that a play cannot be a good play unless it has been a West-end success, but when

selecting from short plays, which come to them straight from the author's pen, they have to decide for themselves whether or not a short play is good *from merely reading it*—a difficult exercise this, and a dramatic education in itself, calculated to develop imagination and the critical faculties. And it is a good thing for dramatic art, because it opens a field, neglected by the professionals, where there are no inhibitions except a reasonable time-limit. An abundance of good short plays, with many adventurous and experimental examples, is the result.

This is not to say that all the one-act plays being turned out to-day are masterpieces. They are not. There are any amount of mediocre short plays, just as there are any amount of mediocre short stories. (And dare I say there are always mediocre long plays to be seen not a mile from Charing Cross!) But it well may be that to commentators in A.D. 2238 our era will be noteworthy, not for the renaissance of dramatic writing (of long plays) which began with "Caste," but for the genesis of the short play—an extraordinary period in English drama during which a band of dramatists suddenly appeared and brought the short play immeasurably nearer to perfection than ever before. And if this prediction is correct, a lot of good marks should go to the Festival movement, which, unconsciously or not, has supplied the required incentive.

UNIVERSITY OF DENVER (U.S.A.)

The Fiftieth production of the University Civic Theatre (University of Denver), "Abraham Lincoln," achieved a phenomenal success and opened its doors—for the first time in its history—to the general public. The portrayal of the title-role by Reginald Pole created a deep impression. In spite of its many scene changes, Mr. Walter Sinclair's production ran smoothly and rapidly as an unusually ingenious unit set took care of this.

Instead of the customary Chroniclers appearing in front of the curtain, their voices were heard in a darkened auditorium, while a spotlight picked out the American Emblem on the black velvet scene curtain. All scenes faded on and off.

MEMORIES OF IRVING.

Much interest has been aroused by the reminiscences of Irving in last month's "Drama." But seeing this feature in print, the author, Mr. Tom Heslewood, has felt that the colloquial nature of his article (which was actually part of an address delivered at Stratford) was unsuitable for the printed page. Had there been time for further revision, Mr. Heslewood tells us he would have made several alterations in phrasing. We gladly publish this opinion, but believe that most readers will have shared our pleasure in the informal and personal atmosphere of Mr. Heslewood's important contribution.

THE PRODUCER SPEAKS

UNDER the title "The Producer examines his Press Cuttings" four interesting lectures have recently been given in the Lecture-room at the Headquarters of the League. Mr. Michael MacOwan, Mr. Norman Marshall, Miss Esmé Church and M. Saint-Denis have in turn stated their personal reactions to what has been said about their work by the dramatic critics.

M. Saint-Denis was perhaps the most "critical" of the critics, although he had to admit that in his time he has received from them his full meed of praise. Nevertheless, he said that in the majority of cases the work of the producer is left unnoticed, or at least not given the attention which it deserves. Actors and the play itself come in for detailed consideration, and he would have welcomed a little more of such attention for the producer.

This was in striking contrast to the view of Mr. MacOwan, who told us that he found it difficult to discuss his press cuttings at all, because none of the critics had mentioned the actual production. This was exactly what he wished. The public, he said, should not sense the hand of the producer at any time. The whole performance should be entirely spontaneous; when a producer was called brilliant he was, in a sense, a failure.

Mr. Norman Marshall took the opportunity to give what was practically a bird's-eye view of his work for the stage. He told us how in the old days at the Cambridge Festival Theatre he had not altogether avoided the temptation of using the play as a medium for experiment. Some of the critics had fallen foul of this, and now he agreed with them. For, like Mr. MacOwan, he had come to the opinion that the "play" was indeed the thing, and that it was the duty of a producer to subordinate both himself and the company in his charge to the task first of discovering and then displaying the playwright's intention.

Mr. Michael MacOwan's lecture concentrated almost entirely on his production of "Mourning Becomes Electra." He closely analysed the script of this play, showing how subtly Eugene O'Neill had welded the stylistic and naturalistic conventions. It had been Mr. MacOwan's aim to convey the very human meaning of the play in a stylised form, so restrained, however, that many of the audience did not realise how stylised the production actually was. In this connection the opinion of an American gentleman present

at the lecture was of interest. He said that in New York the production of the play had been frankly naturalistic. What he saw at the Westminster Theatre had been a great surprise to him, and he ventured to think that Mr. MacOwan's was the better way.

Miss Esmé Church steered rather a middle course. She admitted the right of the producer to experiment widely. But the author's meaning must be preserved within the new convention, however strange or even inappropriate it might at first sight seem to an audience accustomed to a well-worn tradition. The difficulty about reviving the classics was to maintain their freshness. This could only be done if the producer approached his task with a fresh eye, and tried to consider the script as if he was reading it for the first time, and had never seen it acted on the stage before.

NEW THEATRE AT TOYNBEE HALL.

On Wednesday, May 11th, Queen Mary has graciously consented to be present at a Matinee to be held at the Cambridge Theatre, London, to aid funds for the equipment of the new theatre at Toynbee Hall and the establishment of an East End School of Music and Drama. The provisional programme includes items to be contributed by the Old Vic-Sadler's Wells Ballet Company and the Glyndebourne Opera, together with a production of "Shall we join the Ladies" with a cast of stars.

Besides buying tickets for this Matinee, well-wishers can help by promising to supply chairs for the new theatre at two guineas a piece, electric lamps at 5s. each, carpets, scenic canvas and curtain material on the same basis.

This is a good idea for raising money, and those interested should apply for a prospectus to: Mr. Arthur Croxton, 32, Buckingham Palace Road, S.W.1

BAN LIFTED.

Amateur and professional producers will be interested to learn that the Lord Chamberlain has lifted the ban imposed on Vincent Godefroy's play "The Widow of Ephesus." It will be remembered that this play was awarded second prize in the 1935 One-Act Play Competition promoted by the International One-Act Play Theatre. For nearly a year, though the play was published and in circulation it could not be publicly performed.

In appealing to the Lord Chamberlain to reconsider his decision we were able to show that many of the applications to perform this play were received from High Schools and such highly reputable bodies as the Y.M.C.A. and now the Manchester Y.M.C.A. Shakespearean Society has not only given it its first public performance but will enter it in the B.D.L. Festival.

It is highly gratifying to find that the Lord Chamberlain is not so grimly adamant as some of us feared.

ELIZABETH EVERARD, Director.
The International One-Act Play Theatre.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

MENDIP PLAYERS.

An interesting experiment took place during January at Bishopston, Bristol, when the first provincial performance, probably for several hundred years, of a play in a public house was given at the County Ground Hotel, Bishopston. The Mendip Players were chosen to give this pioneer performance by the Committee for Verse and Prose Recitation.

The Hall at the County Ground Hotel, Bishopston, seats only 150 and it was impossible to supply the large demand for tickets.

Somerset is proverbially slow to welcome new ideas and the mood of some was dubious and rather suspicious, but it seems that those who came to jeer stayed to bless, and Mr. Holgate, the Organiser of the Committee, reports he is more than satisfied with the enthusiasm shown.

The Mendip Players interpretation of the play, though full of colour and vitality, was simple and without artificiality.

Perhaps there was something about the conditions, difficult though they were—no stage, nor curtains, nor special lighting—which gave spirit to the occasion. It promises well for the success, throughout the country, of the movement popularly known as "Poet's Pub."

BABER REPERTORY COMPANY.

"Snow"—a play by Stanislaw Przybyszewski in an English translation by O. F. Theis was produced for the first time in this country by the Baber Repertory Company on February 27th at the West Central Hall, W.C.1. It is the story of Bronka, who discovers that Eva, her friend, has been and must always be the relentless force in her husband's life—the will to live and to love, dangerously—whilst her own love is no more to him than the healing warmth of snow on last year's spent earth.

Esther Lawrence gave an altogether accomplished performance as Bronka.

William Avenell was excellent as the husband; and Miriam Edgecumbe brought a real stage presence and a beautiful voice to the small part of Bronka's nurse, symbolising Fate and Death.

Miriam Montagu as Eva and Graeme Cranch as Bronka's philosopher and guide had the most difficult parts and deserve the greater praise for any slight bewilderment in handling typically Russian characters which are no more than means of portraying abstract forces.

The producer, Neysa Grahame, has the invaluable gift of handling an amateur cast so that the play does not lose by any unevenness of talent; and in "Snow" she developed this gift further by never allowing her English actors and audience to be overwhelmed with Russian detail. In fact with the aid of an excellent translation, she produced a good play rather than a poor adaptation. And if the sky was a little blue at times and if the snow was a little erratic, one can only applaud her for not being discouraged by mechanical difficulties.

The main play was preceded by Tchekov's one-act play, "The Boor," with Joseph Victor in the name part,

a praiseworthy but uneven performance: Peggy Thompson as a charming and spirited Madame Popov and Gladys Belchamber successfully transforming the old man servant into an old woman.

The settings of both plays were admirable as were the lighting effects by N. M. Mills.

E. J.

"YEGOR BULICHOFF."

On Saturday, February 26th, I saw a very interesting performance of the first play in Gorky's unfinished trilogy, "Yegor Bulichoff," given by the Theatre Group of the Royal College of Art. Here is drama of real life, queer, tragic, comic, throbbing with an intense vitality. But this "Dickensian" drama, with its heroes and its villains, its fools and fairies, is so entirely Russian as to defy an English company that has not lived with it for years, shall we say! The picture the Theatre Group gave was excellent. If only they had managed to get inside the oddities they had drawn so comprehensively, it would have been a great performance. Every now and then they did, and the play lived, so that we were almost drawn out of our seats. I must mention one actor who lived in his part throughout, he who played Svontzoff so excellently. As for the staging, without going into detail, I must praise the beautiful effect obtained from the cold wintry light that came in from the window, and was lost in the yellow lamplight of the room.

This was a courageous play to attempt, and a performance most enjoyable to watch.

H. M. G.

PORTSMOUTH JUNIOR TECHNICAL SCHOOL.

The Dramatic and Musical Society of this School suffered this year a severe blow in the death of Mr. J. E. L. Walton—a master of the school—who had devoted much time and energy not only to the production of plays by the Society but to the writing of the books of four full-length musical comedies which were presented by the Society.

Mr. Walton possessed not only a genuine love of Drama in all its forms, but a keen sense of humour, a knowledge of dramatic structure and a facile pen which made his own efforts in the writing of musical comedy a delight to all who were privileged to see and hear them.

The Society decided to proceed with the production of one of Mr. Walton's earlier plays—"Greenwood Breeze"—for their annual Christmas concert. It was felt that this would be both an apt tribute to Mr. Walton's memory and entirely in accordance with what he himself would have wished.

As in all past productions of the Society, the cast was drawn entirely from among the Boys of the School who were also responsible, under the direction of members of the Staff, for all the other various activities necessary to the production of a musical comedy. The play, which ran for six nights and which was witnessed by nearly 3,000 people, was an unqualified success.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

STOKE-ON-TRENT.

A Drama School organised by the Staffs. County Committee of the B.D.L. will be held on May 7th, at the Jubilee Hall, Stoke-on-Trent. Instructor Mr. Sladen-Smith of The Unnamed Society, Manchester.

The programme will include Talks, Discussions and Demonstration Rehearsals.

There will be two sessions, 3 p.m. to 4.50 and 5.30 to 8. Doors open at 2.30. Books on Dramatic Subjects such as Production, Make-up, Costume etc., will be available for consultation. Members of the Committee of the Staffordshire Branch of the British Drama League will be present and will be glad to meet members of the B.D.L. Students are asked to be in their places by 3 o'clock.

The play to be rehearsed will be "Edward about to Marry" by Mr. Sladen-Smith, published by Messrs. Gowans and Gray, price 1s. The actors taking part will be drawn from the students of the school and those desirous of doing so should familiarise themselves with the play beforehand. A crowd scene will also be rehearsed.

Tickets 2s. (inclusive for both sessions). Members of Women's Institutes, Old Scholars, Clubs, Girl Guides, Scouts and similar organisations 1s. 6d. each for parties of not less than six.

Tea at a moderate charge will be served in the building.

Hon. Secretary: Mrs. L. Sourley, 28, Kingsway West, Newcastle, Staffs.

BLACKLEY PARISH CHURCH A.D.S.

The above Society gave "The Whole Town's Talking" on February 23rd to 26th to a total audience of 650.

Apart from a new find in H. Weaver as "Chet" the production produced well balanced team work rather than "stars." The cast was helped by excellent scenery constructed by Mr. A. Yates (Production Manager), and a competent stage staff.

E. W. MAUDSLEY,
Hon. Secretary.

LONDON FEDERATION OF BOYS' CLUBS.

The annual Drama Competition, which consists entirely of extracts from one or other of Shakespeare's plays, will take place at Sadler's Wells Theatre on Monday, May 9th. The heats are being decided during the week May 2nd to 7th.

This year an entry of nineteen Clubs is anticipated which will be a record for this competition.

Full particulars may be obtained from Mr. F. O. Marston at the offices of the Federation, 222, Blackfriars Road, Southwark, S.E.1.

RECENT RELEASES.

Of the plays which have become recently available for amateur presentation, "Storm in a Teacup" and "Aren't Men Beasts!" are the most notable. Other new full-length "releases," announced by Messrs. Samuel French, are "Three for Luck" and "Jack O'Diamonds."

B.D.L. FESTIVAL ENTRIES.

(The Adjudicator's name is in *Italics*.)

- April 4th (Divisional Final). Richmond Theatre, Richmond, at 7.30. *Mr. Richard Southern.*
- April 5th (Divisional Final). Scala Theatre, London, at 7.30. *Mr. F. Sladen-Smith.*
- April 9th. Chesterfield. *Mr. Eric Barber.*
- April 9th (Northern Group Final). People's Theatre, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. *Mr. Howieson Cuff.*
- April 9th (Divisional Final). Taunton. *Mr. Richard Southern.*
- April 8th and 9th (Divisional Final). Globe Theatre, R.M. Barracks, Stonehouse, Plymouth. *Miss Marie Jeaffreson.*
- April 11th (Divisional Final). Arts Theatre, Cambridge. *Mr. F. Sladen-Smith.*
- April 27th (Welsh Area Final). Mardy. *Dr. Stefan Hock.*
- April 30th (Western Area Final). Victoria Rooms, Bristol, at 2 p.m. and 7.30 p.m. *Mr. Cyril Wood.*
- April 30th (Northern Area Final). Victoria Hall, Sunderland. *Mr. Michael MacOwan.*
- May 2nd (Eastern Area Final). Scala Theatre, London. *Mr. Michael MacOwan.*
- May 30th (National Final). Theatre Royal, Glasgow.

ESSEX COUNTY COMMITTEE.

On March 19th, at Middlefield, Hatfield Peverel, by kind invitation of Mrs. Barpalet, a large and interested audience heard lectures on "A Visit to the Moscow Drama Festival" by Mrs. Thompson Smith, "Tolstoy and Drama" by Mr. Aylmer Maude (followed by discussion on the acting of Tolstoy's plays) and "Elizabethan Drama for the Amateur" by Mr. Burton. In the unavoidable absence of the President, Alderman L. Cranmer-Bryng, Mrs. Gregory Nicholson presided.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR.

DEAR SIR,

We gave recently a very successful performance of "Hay Fever" at the Cripplegate Theatre, London. Do you know of any Charity that would care for us to give a performance?

Yours faithfully,

ETHEL M. GOWEA,
Hon. Secretary.

Chartered Bank of India,
Australia and China, Amateur Dramatic Society,
38, Bishopsgate, E.C.2.

OBITUARY.

MR. B. A. PITTAR.

Many members of the B.D.L. will learn with regret of the death of Mr. B. A. Pittar, an old Bensonian.

He devoted much of his time in later years to the coaching of amateurs, and there must be many readers of this journal who can bear testimony to his patience, kindness, and skill in steering them clear of the rocks that beset the Dramatic novice.

After his work with the Benson Company, Mr. Pittar played under other managements, including those of the late Sir Philip Ben Greet, Sir John Martin Harvey, and Miss Nancy Price.

His unflinching loyalty to his friends, his sense of chivalry, his rich fund of humour, and his simplicity of spirit earned for him a very large circle of friends, among whom he will be remembered with affection and greatly missed.

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